

STUDENT SPOTLIGHT



MATTHIAS BALZAT *cello*

Matthias Balzat began playing music because that was what his family did. “I first started playing the cello when I was three because I am the youngest of seven children, all of whom grew up playing music.” He says it was inevitable that he too learned to play an instrument. “My siblings were playing violin, piano, flute, guitar, and drums. Cello was just another option.”

Balzat’s interest in classical music grew under his teachers’ enthusiasm and encouragement when he was young. It was his love of unraveling the intricacies of the music itself that made him continue playing, “It’s the details in the score, the details in the music,” he says of what he loves about playing, “the melodies and harmonies, the complexities that take a musician a little longer to explore and figure out.”

The nineteen-year-old from Auckland, New Zealand recently graduated from the University of Waikato. This is Balzat’s second time in the United States, though he was too young to remember the first time. But he says this summer is already one he won’t forget.

Balzat spent the first two weeks of the summer in intensive study with cellist David Finckel as part of the Finckel-Wu Han Chamber Music Studio. For the rest of the summer, he has been studying with Richard Aaron, professor of cello at the University of Michigan and The Juilliard School, whom he first met at a cello festival in New Zealand.

“[Aaron] told me about the AMFS and basically offered me a place here,” explains Balzat. “I couldn’t go last year but I asked him again this year if the offer would still stand. Sure enough, it did.” It was made possible by a New Horizons Fellowship given by Kay and Matthew Bucksbaum.

There are plenty of opportunities in Aspen for Balzat to explore the intricacies of music as a cellist with the Aspen Festival Orchestra every Sunday. The Mendelssohn Violin Concerto with Augustin Hadelich on July 22 was a highlight for Balzat who says the energy in the Music Tent and on stage was electric. Other concerts include some of Balzat’s favorite Shostakovich and Mahler symphonies. In addition, private lessons and the beautiful natural landscape complement his Aspen experience.

His summer at the AMFS will be another step toward a life-long career in music.

“I think for anyone to say that their profession is to be a musician is like a dream,” he says. At the end of the summer, Balzat will begin a new journey to obtain his master’s degree at the Robert Schumann Hochschule für Musik in Düsseldorf, Germany.

As far as where his music will take him, Balzat is not too worried. “Basically, when it comes to music, I love it all,” he says. “It’s not really a concern to me where that leads career-wise because I will always enjoy it.”

Aspen has delivered an unforgettable summer for Balzat. “It’s a paradise of a place to be in whilst you’re putting in the hard work to create wonderful experiences.”

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